

Growing Excitement about our First Diocesan Synod

There is growing excitement about our first Diocesan Synod. This was very evident at the second round of deanery meetings which took place in May (the first round was in October last year). Priests, deacons and three representatives from each parish met in each of the eight deaneries in our diocese. The Reflection Paper, *Communio et Missio*, was presented to them. This booklet contains the six themes that will be addressed at the Synod assembly in September. Each deanery also elected lay delegates to the Synod – one for each parish in the deanery. When those elected were presented to the meeting there was the sense that YES! THE SYNOD WILL BE HAPPENING SOON!!

For those of us on the Preparatory Commission, part of the excitement is witnessing many of the lay leaders finding their voice in a forum that is wider than their own parish. One staunch parishioner from Rondebosch was heard to say: “This is the first time that I have ever been asked my opinion on what is happening in the Church. I feel really important that the archbishop actually wants to know what I think!” A very emotional delegate from one of the Mitchell’s Plain parishes said: “I have prayed all my life for the opportunity to be able to sit down with Catholics from other areas to hear what they are thinking.” “We also have a contribution to make!”, exclaimed one of the Synod delegates who comes originally from Nigeria.

Of course, the Synod is not the first time that lay people from different parishes are getting together. The Archdiocesan Pastoral Council has been in existence for many years; many lay movements have members in different parishes; and catechists and people in different ministries also get together. But this gathering is of special significance because it is the first time the laity will play a role – together with a substantial number of priests, deacons and religious brothers and sisters – in assisting the archbishop in carrying out his ministry of governance of the diocese. The Directory on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops mentions several ways in which a Synod can do this: “by adapting the laws and norms of the universal Church to local conditions; by indicating the policy and programme of apostolic work in the diocese; by resolving difficulties encountered in the apostolate and administration; by giving impetus to general projects and undertakings; and by correcting errors in doctrine and morals if any have crept in.” All those who have been invited by the archbishop as delegates to the Synod do indeed have an awesome responsibility!

The role of the delegates is to “assist” the archbishop in his ministry. Canon Law (#466) tells us that: “The diocesan bishop is the sole legislator in the diocesan Synod. Other members of the synod have only a consultative vote. The diocesan bishop alone signs the synodal declarations and decrees, and only by his authority may these be published.” However, it will only be in very exceptional circumstances that the bishop would not act on what comes out of the Synod.

As the date for the Synod approaches, it is incumbent on all of us to pray for it, that all will be open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Our delegates need to prepare well, that they may speak the truth and listen to others. The lay delegates especially need to be helped to find their voice. As Vatican II put it: “They (the laity) are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even *obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the church.*” (Constitution on the Church #37).

Priests Meet in Preparation for Synod 2007

On 7th June Archbishop Lawrence Henry gathered with a large number of priests to discuss ways of helping the people of the archdiocese engage with and move forward with the Synod process. The meeting also provided a space where questions and concerns relating to the upcoming Synod could be expressed and answered.

The facilitators, Notre Dame Sister Brigid-Rose Tiernan and Holy Cross Sister Alma Kohler started off by exploring the priests’ expectations for the day. Some of the expectations included the following: that the role of the priests, both delegates and non-delegates, in relation to the Synod would be clarified; that things that could hamper open and free discussion of pressing issues would be looked at; and that an atmosphere of openness and listening would be created so that a variety of voices could be heard.

The facilitators explained that the preparation for the Synod has provided an opportunity for many members of the archdiocese to experience communion (e.g. the recent deanery meetings). Communion does not mean a denial of differences of opinion but a particular way of receiving, acknowledging and holding them. In the first exercise

each priest was invited to reflect on: (a) the conditions necessary to make the Synod a success, and (b) the concerns and related issues standing in the way of its success. The priests felt that it was important that the laity and ordained work closely together with each person participating as fully as they can; that the priests be enthusiastic about the Synod; that an atmosphere of listening be created; that there be an openness to the other and a respect for all; that there be a serious commitment to the implementation of the Synod resolutions; and that in the run-up to the Synod and during the time of the Synod there be intense prayer for its success.

Things that would stand in the way of the success of the Synod would include the non-implementation of resolutions, poor listening and communication, disinterest by priests or laity, a feeling that the Synod was a place to impose one's ideas and the Synod just being another talk shop.

To carry the discussion a step further the priests were asked to share and discuss what they considered to be the role of the priests before, during and after the Synod. It was felt that the whole Synod process needs to be carried in prayer before, during and after. Before the Synod the priests recognized that they need to be supportive of all the delegates and that they must promote the Synod in the parishes informing, enthusing and motivating people. The priest needs to be promoting the Synod message at every opportunity. During the synod those who are delegates must participate in the assembly enthusiastically and creatively, thus helping to shape the future of the archdiocese. After the Synod the priest delegates must engage with those who did not attend and inform them of the decisions made. They need also to be a part of the process that sees to the implementation of the Synod decisions.

The day ended on a very positive note and all agreed that for the Synod to be a success that as many people as possible must support it and see to the implementation of the decisions made.

Religious meet in Preparation for the Synod

63 representatives of all the Religious Congregations (Brothers and Sisters) in the archdiocese of Cape Town met with members of the Synod Preparatory Commission on June 23rd. The meeting was lively and interactive and voiced some very definite suggestions and commitments.

Among these was a renewed awareness for the need of personal growth through reflective living, daily examination and prayer and sacrifice – personally and within communities and in both Religious and the wider Church community. This development of spirituality within human living calls us to create greater awareness of our belonging to and ownership of the Church community.

The Religious of the Archdiocese are prepared to contribute totally to keeping the 'flame of the Synod' alive through individual and personal commitment, example and action. For the Brothers and Sisters present, the depth of listening to Synod decisions and taking seriously the challenge of implementation of outcomes, is vital. They are prepared to do this by ensuring that this happens through their apostolate, workshops and by aligning these outcomes with congregational visions. By doing this we take into account our various language and cultural groups – and seriously work within our ministries – so that the Synod outcomes can be totally integrated within the context of parish, deanery and at diocesan level. We need to work with the changing diversity of our area. By contributing, promoting and animating groups, the Religious see their role as being one of quietly strengthening and encouraging the already existing gifts and talents which are evident in our church, parishes, and deaneries.

Some of the hopes of the group present were: the longing for a determined follow up through a central Mass; speakers who can transmit the experience of the Synod discussions clearly and enthusiastically; and on-going directed formation with accountability and evaluation – so that the 'flame of the Trinity' can be kept alive as we are all called to live the reality of the 'Mystical Body.' The Religious look forward with hope to the on-going preparations, the experience of the 23rd–26th September and to the follow up of the 2007 Synod.

From the HEART...

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Peace and Blessings in the Lord.

On 1st November 2005, by solemn decree, I called this local church, the Archdiocese of Cape Town, to prepare for our first ever Diocesan Synod.

As archbishop I am greatly consoled by the prayers and work that have gone into the preparation for the

Synod which is now scheduled to take place at Springfield Convent School, Wynberg from 23 26 September 2007.

This is a further call for more intense prayer for the success of the Synod. There have been a series of meetings at deanery and archdiocesan levels, the fruits of which should have been shared at parish and community levels. The sad reality, however, has been that that sharing has not always been happening, as it should have been.

Nevertheless already so much good has been achieved and all of us should be encouraged by the keen interest in and enthusiasm for the upcoming Synod.

I also now call for total commitment on the part of all delegates who will attend the Synod. Delegates will need to attend all sessions while the Synod is in progress. That will require that priest delegates will possibly need to review times of parish Holy Masses or arrange for Communion Services and also make the necessary arrangements for emergency situations during the days of the Synod.

Lay Delegates too must be totally committed and, if necessary, should already now apply for leave from work. If such leave cannot be obtained then the alternate delegate should be advised so that he/she could make the necessary arrangements and apply for leave from work. There cannot/should not be any swapping of delegates and alternates during the Synod itself. What is necessary for continuity is the commitment of one or the other for the whole of the Synod.

I wish to acknowledge that we have received a sizeable contribution towards the costs of running the Synod. Other contributions would of course be most welcome. At this stage we are also looking for accommodation during the Synod for those delegates from the outlying areas of our archdiocese. They obviously cannot be traveling back to their own homes every evening after the daily sessions. If there are any who could provide accommodation to those individuals we would be very grateful.

With renewed thanks, prayerful good wishes and my blessing,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+Lawrence Henry
Archbishop of Cape Town